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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000163

SENSITIVE  
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SUBJECT: Details on Investigation into Turkish Airlines Plane Crash

Ref: (A) THE HAGUE 00156, (B) AMSTERDAM 00027, (C) AMSTERDAM 00026

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Dutch Safety Board presented its preliminary findings into the cause of the February 25 crash of Turkish Airlines Flight 1951 at a March 4 press conference, pointing principally to a malfunctioning radio altimeter. At the request of the Dutch, Boeing issued a multi-operator message to all 737 model users warning of the faulty altimeter. NTSB Team Chief Joseph Sedor debriefed Mission personnel March 5 on its initial findings and assessed that the altimeter's technical malfunction alone would not have caused the plane to crash. Investigation continues into the role of pilot error as a major factor in the crash. End Summary.

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PRESS CONFERENCE  
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¶2. (U) On March 4, the Dutch Safety Board (DSB) presented its preliminary findings on the causes of the plane crash in its first press conference. The press conference was delivered in Dutch but an English statement was concurrently issued and can be found in its entirety at:

[www.onderzoeksraad.nl/docs/  
rapporten/Persverklaring\\_4\\_maart\\_GB.pdf](http://www.onderzoeksraad.nl/docs/rapporten/Persverklaring_4_maart_GB.pdf).

¶3. (U) DSB key findings pointed to a technical problem with the left radio altimeter, which measures the plane's altitude. The faulty altimeter indicated an incorrect altitude of -8 feet, essentially putting the plane already on the tarmac, while the plane was approaching its descent at an actual altitude of 1950 feet. This incorrect reading was passed onto the automatic pilot system, which was engaged for the landing, causing the plane to slow down, lose engine power, and ultimately stall. By the time the pilots realized the problem and subsequently applied full throttle to the engines, it was too late and the plane crashed. The black box recovered in the crash indicated that a similar problem with the same altimeter occurred in two previous flights captured on the 25 hours of black box recording. The DSB claimed provisional data indicated that the pilots did not initially regard the warning signal for the malfunctioning altimeter to be a problem, implying the pilots did not react to the issue in the most timely manner.

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MEDIA COVERAGE  
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¶4. (U) Coverage of the crash has dominated Dutch media since it occurred on February 25. Newspapers opened with front page headline reports, including officially released information, eye witness reports, and survivors' accounts. Survivors and aircraft experts also appeared on many talk shows. While there was initially very little information available about the nationalities of the passengers, Dutch media picked up on a February 27 "Seattle Times" report stating that two Boeing employees were among the victims.

15. (U) A sample of the March 5 headline stories include the following:

--"De Telegraaf" (sensationalist, mass-circulation, conservative paper): "Human Error"  
--"Algemeen Dagblad" (popular, centrist publication): "Pilots Responded Too Late"  
--"De Volkskrant" (influential liberal paper): "Everything Was Alright, Except for the Speed"  
--"Trouw" (left-of-center paper): "Faulty Altimeter Caused Crash - Pilots' Action at 150 Meters Was Too Late"  
--"NRC Handelsblad" (influential liberal publication): "Crew Did Not Act On Faulty Meter"

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BOEING STATEMENT  
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16. (U) During the press conference, the DSB issued a warning to Boeing on its findings about the faulty altimeter. In response, and with the DSB's clearance, Boeing issued an immediate multi-operator message to all 737 model users. Boeing recommends that all flight crews operating any 737 model be informed of the preliminary results of the DSB investigation and reminded to carefully monitor primary flight instruments and the flight mode annunciation for autoflight modes.

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NTSB DEBRIEF  
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17. (SBU) NTSB Team Chief Joseph Sedor visited the Consulate General

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March 5 to debrief the Charge, Consul General and other Mission personnel on his assessment of the causes of the crash and his impressions of the investigation as a whole. Sedor generally agreed with the DSB's findings (reflected in the DSB's English statement). He added that the initial review indicates pilot error played a larger role than the DSB has implied. According to Sedor, the faulty altimeter alone should not have caused the plane to crash. Sedor believes that the pilots should have been able to compensate and recover from the technical malfunction. According to black box data, 40 seconds had lapsed before the pilots even noticed the warning light on the altimeter, and by the time the pilots took action, it was too late. During this same 40 second interval, the plane was experiencing a high rate of deceleration - well past the speed the pilots had selected - that the pilots should have noticed as well. Moreover, there were three pilots in the cockpit - one more than is standard because this was a training flight for a new pilot - providing an extra set of eyes which still missed the warning light. Sedor thinks the three pilots were likely distracted, possibly in conducting pre-landing checks that Sedor maintains should have been completed before this stage in the flight. Sedor also noted the evidence on the crash site suggested the pilots took some corrective measures that limited the fatalities.

18. (SBU) Sedor remarked that he and his team had received excellent cooperation from the DSB. The NTSB also enjoyed good cooperation from Turkish authorities on the ground in the Netherlands. Sedor also compared the NTSB's and DSB's different approaches to victim's assistance, offering to provide information on the U.S. Family Assistance Act and the NTSB programs addressing the human tragedy of such disasters. For example, the NTSB regularly briefs family members of fatalities well before making any press comments. Sedor and his team planned to leave the Netherlands by March 7, but some members are likely to return to continue to assist with the investigation, as requested by the DSB.

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